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INDICE

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ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΙΣ

Philosophy at a Crossroads
Escaping from Irrelevance

di

Carlo Cellucci*

Abstract: Although there have never been so many professional philosophers as today, most of the questions discussed by today's philosophers are of no interest to cultured people at large. Specifically, several scientists have maintained that philosophy has become an irrelevant subject. Thus philosophy is at a crossroads: either to continue on the present line, which relegates it into irrelevance, or to analyse the reasons of the irrelevance and seek an escape. This paper is an attempt to explore the second alternative.

Keywords: Specialist view of philosophical work, Philosophy as acquisition of knowledge, Ordinary philosophy, Extraordinary philosophy

Abstract: Sebbene non vi siano mai stati tanti filosofi di professione quanti oggi, la maggior parte delle questioni discusse dai filosofi odierni non è interessante per le persone colte in generale. Specificamente, parecchi scienziati hanno affermato che la filosofia è diventata un argomento irrilevante. Perciò la filosofia è a un bivio: continuare sulla linea attuale, che la relega nell'irrilevanza, oppure analizzare le ragioni dell'irrilevanza e cercare una via di uscita. Questo articolo è un tentativo di esplorare la seconda alternativa.

Keywords: concezione specialistica del lavoro filosofico, la filosofia come acquisizione di conoscenza, filosofia ordinaria, filosofia straordinaria

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1. *Introduction*

The present condition of philosophy is a peculiar one. On the one hand, there have never been so many professional philosophers as today, on the other hand, philosophy has never been so irrelevant.

By this I mean that most of the questions considered by today's philosophers are of interest only to academics working in a little corner of philosophy, not to those working in other corners of philosophy, let alone to people working in other subjects or to cultured people at large. This is not healthy for philosophy because, although a discipline may exist for some time even with a limited audience, this will put its long-term survival at risk, at least in academic institutions.

Thus philosophy is at a crossroads: either to continue on the present line, which relegates it into irrelevance, or to analyse the reasons of irrelevance and seek an escape. This paper is an attempt to explore the latter alternative.

2. *The Multiplication of Philosophers and the Irrelevance of Philosophy*

That there have never been so many professional philosophers as today is clear, for example, from the fact that the American Philosophical Association has over ten thousand members. If we add the members of the philosophical associations of the other countries, we have a total number of some tens of thousands, presumably more than the number of philosophers that existed from antiquity to the nineteenth century. That there have never been so many professional philosophers as today is also clear from the fact that, in the world, there are virtually several conferences of philosophy each day of the year, which explains why the overwhelming majority of philosophy books published today are conference proceedings rather than monographs.

On the other hand, that philosophy has never been so irrelevant is clear, for example, from the critical remarks of several scientists.

Thus, Hawking and Mlodinow say that questions such as «How can we understand the world in which we find ourselves? How does the universe behave? What is the nature of reality? Where did all this come from? Did the universe need a creator?» are traditionally «questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead»[1]. It «has not kept

[1] S. Hawking-L. Mlodinow, *The grand design*, Bantham Books, New York 2010, p. 5.

up with modern developments in science, particularly physics», so «scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge»[2].

Weinberg says: «I know of no one who has participated actively in the advance of physics in the postwar period whose research has been significantly helped by the work of philosophers»[3]. Philosophy of science «at its best seems to me a pleasing gloss on the history and discoveries of science. But we should not expect it to provide today's scientists with any useful guidance»[4]. At most, «the work of some philosophers helps us to avoid the errors of other philosophers»[5].

Dyson says that «for most of the twenty-five centuries since written history began, philosophers were important», and «until the end of the nineteenth century, philosophers were giants playing a dominant role in the kingdom of the mind»[6]. But, «compared with the giants of the past», the present philosophers «are a sorry bunch of dwarfs. They are thinking deep thoughts and giving scholarly lectures to academic audiences, but hardly anybody in the world outside is listening. They are historically insignificant. At some time toward the end of the nineteenth century, philosophers faded from public life» and «suddenly and silently vanished. So far as the general public was concerned, philosophers became invisible»[7]. This raises the question: «When and why did philosophy lose its bite? How did it become a toothless relic of past glories?»[8].

Many philosophers treat such critical remarks by scientists with condescension. For example, Crane argues that, although Hawking and Mlodinow claim that «the discipline of academic philosophy is dead because it "has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics"», their book «itself is full of philosophy»[9]. But «unfortunately, much of the book's own philosophical argument

[2] *Ibidem*.
[3] S. Weinberg, *Dreams of a final theory*, Vintage Books, New York 1993, pp. 168-169.
[4] Ivi, p. 167.
[5] Ivi, p. 168.
[6] F. Dyson, *Dreams of earth and sky*, The New York Review of Books, New York 2015, p. 243.
[7] *Ibidem.*
[8] *Ibidem*.
[9] T. Crane, *Philosophy, science and the value of understanding*, in K. Almqvist-I. Thomas (eds.), *Sapere aude: The future of the humanities in British universities*, Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, Stockholm, in press.

is of a very low standard, and shows a striking lack of reflection on the complexities of what is being claimed»[10]. Thus, «on the evidence of Hawking and Mlodinow's book, the situation is actually the opposite of the way they describe it: it is the scientists who have not kept up with developments in philosophy»[11].

This argument, however, is an instance of the *ad hominem* fallacy. Instead of answering the Hawking and Mlodinow's charge that the discipline of academic philosophy is dead, it tries to discredit Hawking and Mlodinow's philosophical abilities. Thus, it overlooks that discrediting the messenger does not discredit the message.

Anyway, even if most philosophers treat critical remarks by scientists with condescension, a few philosophers admit that philosophy has never been so irrelevant.

Thus, Fodor says that today «nobody reads philosophy»[12]. Or, rather, «academics like me, who eke out their sustenance by writing and teaching the stuff, still browse in the journals», but the laity «seems to have lost interest. And it's mostly Anglophone analytic philosophy that it has lost interest in»[13].

Haack says that «something is rotten in the state of philosophy»[14]. Indeed, «over the years philosophy has become more and more out of touch with its own history, more and more hyper-specialized, more and more fragmented into cliques, niches, cartels, and fiefdoms, and more and more dominated by intellectual fads and fashions»[15]. A non-negligible role has been played in this by «the ever-increasing intrusiveness of copy-editors dedicated to ensuring that everyone write the same deadly, deadpan academic prose», or «the endless demands of» a «peer-review process by now not only relentlessly conventional but also, sometimes, outright corrupt»[16].

Frodeman says that «twentieth century philosophy has been unhealthily insular»[17]. Philosophers «became experts like other disci-

[10] *Ibidem*.
[11] *Ibidem.*
[12] J. Fodor, *Water's water everywhere*, «London Review of Books» 26/20 (2004), pp. 17-19, p. 17.
[13] *Ibidem*.
[14] S. Haack, *The real question: Can philosophy be saved?*, «Free Inquiry» 37/6 (2017), pp. 40-43, p. 40.
[15] *Ibidem.*
[16] *Ibidem.*
[17] R. Frodeman, *Philosophy dedisciplined*, «Synthese» 190 (2013), pp. 1917-1936, p. 1918.

plinary specialists»[18]. They developed «sub-specializations far from the comprehension of the person on the street»[19]. But a philosophy «where philosophers primarily work with and write for other philosophers, is in the end no philosophy at all»[20]. This «is part of what has led philosophy, potentially the most relevant of subjects, to become a synonym for irrelevance»[21].

That philosophy, potentially the most relevant of subjects, has become a synonym for irrelevance, should deeply worry philosophers and convince them that there is something intrinsically wrong with the present approach to a subject that was once hailed as «the supreme among the sciences»[22]. And «most divine and most worthy»[23].

As Bobbio humorously says, the irrelevance of philosophy risks proving right «Xanthippe, Socrates's wife, who has gone down in tradition as the wife that does not understand why her husband wastes his time discussing philosophy, becoming embroiled in discussions that are of no use. And what if she were right?»[24].

3. *The Specialist View of Philosophical Work*

A consequence of the fact that there have never been so many professional philosophers as today is the specialist view of philosophical work. By this I mean the view according to which a philosopher should confine his research to a small sector of the discipline, deriving the theme and a good deal of the contents of his research from the reference philosophical community, and basing his research on the fundamental assumptions generally accepted by the members of that community.

A passionate praise of the specialist view of philosophical work is made by Marconi. He observes that, while the traditional image of the philosopher was that of «the Great Philosopher», in the past century there has been a multiplication of philosophers, so «the image of the Great Philosopher tended to tarnish»[25]. How could there be «dozens and

[18] R. Frodeman-A. Briggle, *Socrates tenured*, Rowman & Littlefield, London 2016, p. 7.
[19] Ivi, p. 9.
[20] R. Frodeman, *Philosophy dedisciplined*, cit., p. 1935.
[21] Ivi, p. 1918.
[22] Aristot., *Metaph.*, A 2, 982 b 4.
[23] Ivi, A 2, 983 a 5.
[24] N. Bobbio, *La filosofia e il bisogno di senso*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2017, p. 45.
[25] D. Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare: La filosofia nell'epoca del professionismo*, Einaudi,

then hundreds of personalities capable of so much? Wasn't there something ridiculous about this infinite multiplication of world systems, *allgemeine Wissenschaftslehren*, revelations of the essence of things?»[26]. Thus, «it was necessary to find ways to make philosophy a task within the reach of scholars perhaps educated and intelligent, but not necessarily geniuses nor astonishingly original», and to make the professional philosopher more into «a competent artisan» than into «a cathedrals architect»[27]. The answer to this situation has been the specialist view of philosophical work. The traditional image of the Great Philosopher has been replaced with that of a professional who, like a scientist, aims at a partial task.

In particular, there have been three main solutions to «the problem of transforming the Great Philosopher into a philosophy professional»[28].

The first solution has been history of philosophy, since this «was a work within the reach of many people», not requiring an «encyclopedic knowledge, or Descartes' or Kant's inventiveness»[29]. For such reason, this solution «had, and still has, great fortune»[30]. Nevertheless «it had a drawback: it deprived philosophy of its theoretical soul», since «it made philosophers into football journalists, from football players that they had been»[31]. And, as Floridi says, «to maintain that historiographic research is today the best training ground to become good philosophers means to have lost sight of the fundamental difference between sports reporters and professional footballers»[32]. Therefore, «this solution has not been the most successful one among philosophers who did not intend to give up the theoretical vocation»[33].

The second solution has been hermeneutics, which, in Gadamer's version, required «to reconstruct individual events, to describe specific constellations of concepts, and mostly – in practice – to narrate the use certain authors made of certain words»[34]. These tasks are surely «challenging, but within the reach of many scholars of less than Kantian

Turin 2014, p. 18.
[26] *Ibidem*.
[27] Ivi, pp. 18-19.
[28] Ivi, p. 60.
[29] Ivi, p. 20.
[30] *Ibidem*.
[31] *Ibidem*.
[32] L. Floridi, *I filosofi: calciatori o giornalisti?*, in F. P. Firrao (ed.), *La filosofia italiana in discussione*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2001, pp. 337-361, p. 345.
[33] D. Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*, cit., p. 20.
[34] Ivi, p. 22.

or Hegelian standing»[35]. In this respect, «the hermeneutic solution is similar to the historico-philosophical solution; but, in addition, it has the advantage of presenting itself as a theoretical research, which fully meets that need of illuminating the present which is traditionally assigned to philosophy, and which may be thought to be frustrated by historico-philosophical research»[36]. However, this solution has the drawback that, as Engel says, it views philosophy as «something that has been» already «done, upon which you can only comment, propose new readings, or to which you come back»[37].

The third solution has been analytic philosophy, which is «interested in philosophical problems in their current formulation», not in their «past history»[38]. This «permits one to restrict one's research area as much as desired», and «the temporal limitation to strict contemporaries drastically limits bibliographies»[39]. The analytic philosopher, being freed of «the enormous task of providing an overall view of things, can be identified – along with natural scientists – as a professional who tries to give a contribution to the solution of a problem at which many others work»[40]. Thus, analytic philosophy «is the paradigm of the artisan view of philosophy: the one that considers philosophy as an "honest craft", not reserved for geniuses but open to many people»[41]. This is the solution most suited «for a situation in which professional philosophers are some tens of thousands»[42].

In a sense, Marconi is right. Analytic philosophy is the solution best suited for philosophers in a situation in which professional philosophers are some tens of thousands, because it allows mass production. Thus, it permit philosophers to multiply their publications, which is quite advantageous to further their academic careers.

But the question is not whether analytic philosophy is the solution best suited for philosophers, but if it is the solution best suited for philosophy, or rather it is itself one of the causes of its irrelevance. Since analytic philosophy is today the most widespread in the world,

[35] *Ibidem*.
[36] *Ibidem*.
[37] P. Engel, *French and American philosophical dispositions*, «Stanford French Review» 15 (1991), pp. 165-181, p. 170.
[38] D. Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*, cit., p. 23.
[39] Ivi, p. 24.
[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] Ivi, p. 25.
[42] *Ibidem*.

there is a legitimate suspicion that it has some significant responsibility in the present irrelevance of philosophy. Before dealing with this question, I will consider some limitations of the specialist view of philosophical work.

4. *Analytic Philosophy and the Specialist View of Philosophical Work*

Marconi's praise of the specialist view of philosophical work is characteristic of analytic philosophy. Carnap made an equally passionate praise of the specialist view of philosophical work already in 1928.

According to Carnap, traditional philosophy has very little to show for two and a half thousand years of endeavour, because its propositions «have no logical contents, but are only expressions of feeling»[43]. Indeed, «the attitude of the traditional philosopher» is «like that of a poet»[44]. Conversely, with analytic philosophy a «new type of philosophy has arisen in close contact with the work of the special sciences»[45]. The philosophers of the new type «have taken the strict and responsible orientation of the scientific investigator as their guideline for philosophical work»[46]. The individual philosopher «no longer undertakes to erect in one bold stroke an entire system of philosophy. Instead, each works at his special place within the one unified science»[47]. For, «if we allot to the individual in philosophical work as in the special sciences only a partial task», then «in slow careful construction insight after insight will be won. Each collaborator contributes only what he can endorse and justify before the whole body of his co-workers»[48]. Thus «stone will be carefully added to stone and a safe building will be erected at which each following generation can continue to work», and this will «eliminate all speculative and poetic work from philosophy»[49].

As apparent from Carnap's and Marconi's statements, the specialist view of philosophical work is based on the supposition that

[43] R. Carnap, *Logical syntax of language*, Routledge, London 2001, p. 278.
[44] R. Carnap, *The logical structure of the world* and *Pseudoproblems in philosophy*, Open Court, Chicago 2003, p. xvi.
[45] *Ibidem*.
[46] *Ibidem*.
[47] *Ibidem*.
[48] Ivi, p. xvii.
[49] *Ibidem*.

all philosophical work is cumulative. That is, it progresses in small increments that build over prior work, without involving any change in the fundamental assumptions generally accepted by the members of the reference philosophical community.

However, the supposition that all philosophical work is cumulative is unjustified. Analytic philosophers have opposite views even on key issues.

For example, with respect to the issue of the relation between philosophy and science, on the one hand, Quine supports scientism, the view that the present sciences are the only true channel of knowledge. For, he maintains that «the only point of view» philosophy «can offer» is «the point of view of our own science»[50]. That is, the point of view of the present sciences. Therefore, philosophical explanations must be replaced with "naturalized" versions, which explain the concepts with which human beings operate in terms of scientific concepts, that is, in terms of «the very fruits of science»[51]. On the other hand, Dummett opposes scientism. For, he maintains that «to regard the natural sciences as the only true channel of knowledge» is to reduce the task of philosophy «to that of adding ornamentation to the theories of the scientists»[52]. Also, to «replace philosophical explanations with "naturalized" versions» which «explain our having the concepts that we do in terms» of scientific concepts, «is not philosophy; but it is not science either. It is the result of the bedazzlement of those who have undertaken one manner of intellectual inquiry via the successes of another»[53].

In addition to the issue of the relation between philosophy and science, there are many other key issues on which analytic philosophers have opposite views[54].

Since the supposition that all philosophical work is cumulative is unjustified, the specialist view of philosophical work is inadequate.

[50] W. V. Quine, *Theories and things*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1981, p. 181.
[51] W. V. Quine, *From stimulus to science*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1995, p. 16.
[52] M. Dummett, *The nature and future of philosophy*, Columbia University Press, New York 2010, p. 35.
[53] Ivi, p. 36.
[54] For an empirical study, see D. Bourget-D. J. Chalmers, *What do philosophers believe?*, «Philosophical Studies» 170 (2014), pp. 465-500; see also, D. J. Chalmers, *Why isn't there more progress in philosophy?*, «Philosophy» 90 (2015), pp. 3-31.

5. *Analytic Philosophy and the Irrelevance of Philosophy*

After considering some limitations of the specialist view of philosophical work, I return to the question of the responsibility of analytic philosophy in the irrelevance of philosophy.

As Marconi says, analytic philosophy permits one to restrict one's research area as much as desired. This has led many analytic philosophers to deal with ever more minute questions, irrelevant to our understanding of the world. Instead of concerning themselves with questions about the world, they have concerned themselves with questions suggested by other analytic philosophers.

Galileo admonishes philosophers that their «discourses should be about the sensible world and not about a world of paper»[55].

Haack gives a similar admonishment: «Never forget that philosophy, like physics or biology, is about the world, not just about our language or our concepts – and especially, not just about what another member of this or that little professional circle said last year»[56].

Yet, many analytic philosophers treat philosophy as being not about the world, but just about what another member of this or that little professional circle said last year.

Thus, Moore says: «I do not think that the world» would «ever have suggested to me any philosophical problems. What has suggested philosophical problems to me is things which other philosophers have said about the world»[57]. The problems in which «I have been (and still am) very keenly interested» are «first, the problem of trying to get really clear as to what on earth a given philosopher meant by something which he said, and, secondly, the problem of discovering what really satisfactory reasons there are for supposing that what he said was true, or, alternatively, was false»[58].

This position, however, is self-defeating. For, Moore would not have been able to discuss things which other philosophers said about the world if all philosophers had been like him, that is, if they had not concerned themselves with problems suggested by the world.

[55] G. Galilei, *Opere*, vol. VII, Barbera, Florence 1968, p. 139.
[56] S. Haack, *The fragmentation of philosophy, the road to reintegration*, in J. F. Göhner-E.-M. Jung (eds.), *Susan Haack: Reintegrating philosophy*, Springer, Cham 2016, pp. 3-32, pp. 26-27.
[57] G. E. Moore, *An autobiography*, in P. A. Schilpp (ed.), *The philosophy of G. E. Moore*, Open Court, La Salle 1942, pp. 3-39, p. 14.
[58] *Ibidem*.

Nor Moore would have been able to discover what really satisfactory reasons there were for supposing that what other philosophers said about the world was true, or, alternatively, was false, without dealing with questions about the world.

Wittgenstein says that «philosophy gives no pictures of reality»[59]. It «arises neither from an interest in the facts of nature, nor from a need to grasp causal connections»[60]. In philosophy, «there are no great essential problems in the sense of science»[61]. Philosophy «is a tool which serves only for use against philosophers»[62].

This has given rise to a new kind of philosophy, characterized by an argumentative style made of dreary distinctions concerning ever more minute questions, irrelevant to our understanding of the world.

Thus, Williamson says: «To give an example of the kind of problem that I'm interested in, we can say that J. F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe could have had a child, and the issue arises of whether one can say that there is such a thing as a possible child of JFK and Marilyn Monroe. If so, what sort of thing is it? This is an area which is susceptible of quite rigorous logical analysis»[63].

But the question is not whether this is an area which is susceptible of quite rigorous logical analysis, it is rather whether it is an area capable of making any significant contribution to our understanding of the world.

In this regard, Dennett suggests the following significance test. If you are tempted to deal with some problem discussed within the reference philosophical community, and wonder whether the problem is significant and worth pursuing, «don't count on the validation of your fellow graduate students or your favorite professors» or any other member of the reference philosophical community, for «they all have a vested interest in keeping the enterprise going. It's what they know how to do; it's what they are good at»[64]. Rather, try «seeing if folks outside philosophy», or uninitiated «undergraduates, can be

[59] L. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 1991, p. 106.
[60] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen – Philosophical investigations*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2009, part I, § 89.
[61] L. Wittgenstein, *The big typescript TS 213*, Blackwell, Oxford 2005, p. 301.
[62] L. Wittgenstein, *Typescript beginning* "Muss sich denn nicht". Probably 1932 or 1933. 24 pp. http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/BFE/Ts-219_f [18.06.2018], p. 11.
[63] T. Williamson, *On vagueness*, in J. Baggini-J. Stangroom (eds.), *New British philosophy*, Routledge, London 2002, pp. 147-162, p. 162.
[64] D. C. Dennett, *Higher-order truths about Chmess*, «Topoi» 25 (2006), pp. 39-41, p. 40.

made to care»[65]. If they cannot be made to care, you should consider the possibility that «you're following a self-supporting community of experts into an artifactual trap»[66].

Would the kind of problem in which Williamson is interested pass Dennett's test? It seems very doubtful. Generally, many problems considered by analytic philosophers would not pass Dennett's test because, as Dennett says, «many projects in contemporary» analytic «philosophy are artifactual puzzles of no abiding significance»[67].

That many projects in contemporary analytic philosophy are artifactual puzzles of no abiding significance, is a first main cause of the irrelevance of philosophy.

6. *An Analytic Reaction to the Irrelevance of Philosophy*

Of course, the vast majority of analytic philosophers would deny that many projects in contemporary analytic philosophy are artifactual puzzles of no abiding significance.

Thus, Casati claims that «the work done in philosophy in the last century, if not in the last twenty years, is incomparably more interesting and clear than the work done by the masters of ages past»[68]. It «is thus better, if one wants to get a grip on what preoccupies a professional epistemologist, to read, rather than the *Theaetetus*, the works by "a named BonJour"»[69]. Indeed, there is no proof that «history of philosophy has any relevance whatsoever to philosophy», so philosophers may «ignore both history of philosophy and other traditions»[70].

These claims are peculiar, in particular because much work by analytic professional epistemologists has been concerned with the view that knowledge is justified true belief – a view that Plato had already shown to be untenable just in the *Theaetetus*[71].

Nevertheless, some analytic philosophers admit that several analytic philosophers have produced philosophy which many people

[65] Ivi, p. 41.
[66] Ivi, p. 40.
[67] Ivi, p. 39.
[68] R. Casati, *Review of* P. Rossi (ed.), *La filosofia*, «Dialectica» 55 (2001), pp. 74-84, p. 75.
[69] *Ibidem*.
[70] *Ibidem*.
[71] See C. Cellucci, *Rethinking knowledge: The heuristic view*, Springer, Cham 2017, Section 6.1.

consider irrelevant, and hence look for an escape from irrelevance.

Such is the case of Unger, who says that analytic philosophy «offers little or nothing substantial about concrete reality»[72]. It is «heavily pervaded with concretely empty ideas»[73]. Namely, with ideas «empty of import for, or as regards to, concrete reality»[74]. For, according to analytic philosophy, «by contrast with the natural sciences, intellectually responsible philosophy should offer no substantial thoughts about the general nature of concrete reality»[75]. Therefore, analytic philosophy is a «terribly deficient philosophy, at least as compared with much philosophy saliently offered in earlier eras»[76]. Conversely, «it's proper for philosophy to offer quite substantial ideas about concrete reality»[77].

But what escape does Unger suggest for philosophy? He maintains that, «for there to be any significant hope as regards philosophy's prospects, at least two things must come to pass»[78]. First, «some of the most intelligent and philosophically talented young people must become serious scientists, contributing a great deal to the science in which they are involved»[79]. Second, «we must not require so very much of a proposed idea, by way of depth», for «the idea to count as a properly philosophical thought» a «little leeway» must be «tolerated»[80]. Specifically, «as regards matters of depth», it must be tolerated that there will be «a significant difference between what will be allowed to count as a philosophical idea and, on the other side, very nearly all other concretely substantial ideas, including very nearly all scientific substantial propositions»[81].

Unger's suggested escape, however, seems unrealistic. As Unger himself admits, «it will be extremely difficult and, perhaps, it may be very unlikely», that the two things in question will come to pass; but, «short of that, there is no realistic chance, at all, for there being offered, during the next century or so, any new concretely substantial philosophical

[72] P. Unger, *Empty ideas: A critique of analytic philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, p. 21.
[73] Ivi, p. 25.
[74] Ivi, p. 6.
[75] Ivi, p. 1.
[76] Ivi, p. 21.
[77] *Ibidem*.
[78] Ivi, p. 239.
[79] *Ibidem*.
[80] Ivi, p. 240.
[81] *Ibidem*.

ideas that amount to anything much more than idle speculation»[82].

However, even if the two things in question came to pass, this would not be very gratifying for philosophy, since it would reduce philosophy to a weekend occupation for scientists. Indeed, the image of the philosopher of the future that Unger puts forward is that of a scientist who, in addition to doing his normal work as a scientist, on weekends philosophizes on it, but without too many pretensions. For, one cannot be too picky, one cannot demand that philosophical work be marked with depth.

7. *Philosophy as Acquisition of Knowledge*

If we want to rescue philosophy from irrelevance, we must ask: What is philosophy?

Several people consider this question insignificant. For example, Popper claims that a philosopher «should try to solve philosophical problems, rather than talk about philosophy»[83].

This claim is somewhat inconsistent of the author of a paper entitled: «How I see philosophy»[84]. Anyhow, the claim is unjustified. For, what sort of philosophy one does and what problems one wants to solve, depend on what answer one gives to the question "What is philosophy?" From its very beginning as a discipline, philosophy has called into question all human knowledge including itself, so philosophy has always been, to some extent at least, a discourse about philosophy.

A crucial question about philosophy is the relation of philosophy to knowledge. Therefore, any answer to the question "What is philosophy?" will involve an answer to the question of the relation of philosophy to knowledge.

In fact, the only answer to the question "What is philosophy?" that might rescue philosophy from irrelevance, is: Philosophy is acquisition of knowledge. For, only if philosophy is acquisition of knowledge, philosophy can be useful and relevant to our understanding of the world.

[82] *Ibidem*.
[83] K. R. Popper, *Conjectures and refutations: The growth of scientific knowledge*, Routledge, London 1974, p. 68.
[84] See K. R. Popper, *In search of a better world: Lectures and essays from thirty years*, Routledge, London 1994, pp. 173-187.

The view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge is by no means new. It goes back to the very beginning of philosophy as a discipline.

Indeed, Plato says: «Philosophy is acquisition of knowledge [*ktesis epistemes*]»[85]. For, only «the one who wholeheartedly tries all knowledge, who is eager to know and is insatiable for it, may be rightly called a philosopher»[86]. Thus, «to be a philosopher is the same thing as to be a lover of knowledge»[87]. Philosophy aims at acquiring all possible knowledge about the world, and at giving a global view of it, since «anyone who can have a global view is a philosopher, and anyone who can't isn't»[88].

One might think that to say that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge contrasts with the etymological meaning of the word *philosophia*, that is, "love of wisdom". But it is not so. Already Plato makes it clear that wisdom cannot be separated from knowledge.

Indeed, Plato says: «What makes people wise is wisdom», and wisdom is in no way «different from knowledge», since people are «wise in just those things of which they have knowledge», therefore «knowledge and wisdom are the same thing»[89].

One might also think that to say that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge means that philosophy is acquisition of theoretical knowledge, not of practical knowledge. But it is not so. Once again, already Plato makes it clear that philosophy is acquisition of both theoretical and practical knowledge.

Indeed, Plato says that one can «divide all knowledge» into two forms, «theoretical knowledge», and «practical knowledge»[90]. Theoretical knowledge is proper to arts which are «stripped of action and furnish only cognition»[91]. Practical knowledge is «knowledge which naturally inheres in actions»[92]. But the division of knowledge into two forms is not an opposition, theoretical and practical knowledge are simply «the two forms of knowledge, which is one in its entirety»[93]. And «the philosopher desires the whole of knowledge, not just one part of it and not

[85] Plat., *Euthyd.*, 288d 8.
[86] Plat., *Resp.*, V 475c 6-8.
[87] Ivi, II 376b 9-10.
[88] Ivi, VII 537c 7.
[89] Plat., *Theaet.*, 145d 11-e 6.
[90] Plat., *Polit.*, 258e 4-5.
[91] Ivi, 258d 5-6.
[92] Ivi, 258d 9-e 1.
[93] Ivi, 258e 6-7.

the other»[94]. Therefore, philosophy is acquisition of both theoretical and practical knowledge.

8. *The Tradition of Philosophy as Acquisition of Knowledge*

From antiquity to the end of the nineteenth century, many people have reaffirmed the view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge.

Thus, Aristotle says that «philosophy is rightly called knowledge of the truth»[95]. But «we do not know a truth without knowing its cause»[96]. So, philosophy is primarily knowledge of first principles, since first principles «are the cause of the being of other things»[97]. Therefore, «it is through them and from them that the other things are known»[98]. Knowledge of first principles and wisdom are the same thing, because «wisdom is knowledge of first principles»[99].

Cicero says: «Philosophy, to interpret the word, is nothing else but the study of wisdom. And wisdom, as the old philosophers defined it, is knowledge of divine and human things and of the causes by which these things are connected together»[100].

Bacon says: «I have taken all knowledge to be my province»[101]. Philosophy is a «universal science, to be as the mother of the rest, and to be regarded in the progress of knowledge as portion of the main and common way», thus, a «*Philosophia Prima*» which «may be a receptacle for all such axioms as are not peculiar to any of the particular sciences, but belong to several of them in common»[102].

Descartes says: «This word "philosophy" means the study of wisdom», where «by "wisdom" is meant not only prudence in everyday affairs, but also a perfect knowledge of all things that mankind is capable of knowing, both for the conduct of his life, and for the conservation of his health, and for the discovery of all the arts»[103]. Indeed, «to try to

[94] Plat., *Resp.*, V 475b 8-9.
[95] Aristot., *Metaph.*, α 1, 993b 19-20.
[96] Ivi, α 1, 993b 23-24.
[97] Ivi, α 1, 993b, 29-30.
[98] Ivi, A 2, 982b 2-3.
[99] Ivi, K 1, 1059a 18.
[100] Cic., *De off.*, II 2, 5.
[101] F. Bacon, *Works*, Longmans, London 1857-1874, vol. VIII p. 109.
[102] Ivi, vol. IV p. 337.
[103] R. Descartes, *Oeuvres*, Vrin, Paris 1996, vol. IX.2, p. 2.

acquire» this kind of knowledge «is properly termed philosophizing»[104].

Hobbes says: «Philosophy» is «the study of wisdom»[105]. And «wisdom, properly called, is nothing else» but «the perfect knowledge of the truth in all matters whatsoever»[106].

Spinoza says: «The aim of philosophy is nothing but truth», and «philosophy should be drawn from nature alone»[107]. For, «the universal history of nature» is «the sole ground of philosophy»[108].

Kant says: «Philosophy» is «either cognition from pure reason or rational cognition from empirical principles»[109]. In either case, philosophy involves cognitions, because «without cognitions one will never become a philosopher»[110]. In addition to cognitions, philosophy involves that one «sees how all cognitions fit together in an edifice, in rule-governed ways, for such ends as are suited to humanity»[111]. Thus philosophy involves wisdom, since «wisdom is the relation» of a cognition «to the essential ends of humanity»[112]. Conversely, wisdom involves knowledge and science, because «wisdom without science is a silhouette of a perfection to which we will never attain»[113].

Spencer says: «Though in the extent of the sphere which they have supposed philosophy to fill, men have differed and still differ very widely, yet there is a real if unavowed agreement among them in signifying» by "philosophy" a special kind of knowledge, that is, «knowledge of the highest degree of generality»[114].

Mach says: «Scientific thought presents itself in two seemingly different forms: as philosophy and as specialist research», that is, research of «the specialist scientist»[115]. But «the ultimate end of all research is

[104] *Ibidem*.
[105] T. Hobbes, *English works*, Longman, London 1839-1845, vol. I p. xiv.
[106] Ivi, vol. II p. iii.
[107] B. Spinoza, *Theological-political treatise*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, p. 184.
[108] Ivi, p. 191.
[109] I. Kant, *Critique of pure reason*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, A 840/B 868.
[110] I. Kant, *Lectures on logic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992, p. 538.
[111] Ivi, p. 261.
[112] I. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, de Gruyter, Berlin 1900–, vol. XVI p. 66, *Reflexion* 1652.
[113] I. Kant, *Lectures on logic*, cit., p. 539.
[114] H. Spencer, *A system of synthetic philosophy*, Vol. I: *First principles*, Williams and Norgate, London 1887, Part II, § 37, p. 131.
[115] E. Mach, *Knowledge and error: Sketches on the psychology of enquiry*, Springer, Dordrecht 1976, p. 2.

just the same. This shows itself also in the fact that the greatest philosophers» have «opened up new ways of specialist enquiry» for the specialist scientist, and «philosophy has furnished science with some positive notions of value too»[116].

9. *Analytic Philosophy and the Advancement of Knowledge*

While, from antiquity to the end of the nineteenth century, many people have reaffirmed the view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge, in the twentieth century this view has been abandoned. In particular, many analytic philosophers have claimed that philosophy does not advance knowledge.

Thus, Wittgenstein says that philosophy does not advance knowledge, since it is «essential to» philosophical «investigation that we do not seek to learn anything new by it», but only «to understand something that is already in plain view»[117]. For, «since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to explain», and, on the other hand, «whatever may be hidden is of no interest to us»[118]. Philosophy «leaves everything as it is»[119]. It «just puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything», indeed, «the name "philosophy" might also be given to what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions»[120].

Ryle says that «philosophy is not a sister science or a parent science», since «its business is not to add to the number of scientific statements»[121]. Philosophy is «intended not to increase what we know» but only to determine «the logical geography of the knowledge which we already possess»[122]. Namely, philosophy is intended only «to reveal the logic of the propositions in which» knowledge is «wielded, that is to say, to show with what other propositions they are consistent and inconsistent, what propositions follow from them and from what propositions they follow»[123]. For, philosophy is only «the clarification

[116] Ivi, p. 3.
[117] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, cit., Part I, § 89.
[118] Ivi, Part I, § 126.
[119] Ivi, Part I, § 124.
[120] Ivi, Part I, § 126.
[121] G. Ryle, *Collected papers*, vol. I, Routledge, Abingdon 2009, pp. 261-262.
[122] G. Ryle, *The concept of mind*, Routledge, Abingdon 2009, p. lix.
[123] Ivi, p. lx.

of ideas»[124]. The «philosopher throws new light, but he does not give new information»[125].

Dummett says that philosophy «is indeed concerned with reality, but not to discover new facts about it», it only «seeks to improve our understanding of what we already know. It does not seek to observe more, but to clarify our vision of what we see»[126]. Thus, «philosophy does not advance knowledge: it clarifies what we already know»[127].

Hacker says that «philosophy is not a contribution to human knowledge, but to human understanding»[128]. It does not advance knowledge, indeed one might even «say, with only a little exaggeration, that in philosophy, 'If it's news, it's wrong'»[129].

That many analytic philosophers have maintained that philosophy does not advance knowledge, marks a sharp discontinuity with the philosophical tradition starting with Plato according to which philosophy is acquisition of knowledge.

Wittgenstein says: «My method throughout is to point out mistakes in language. I am going to use the word "philosophy" for the activity of pointing out such mistakes. Why do I wish to call our present activity philosophy, when we also call Plato's activity philosophy? Perhaps because of a certain analogy between them, or perhaps because of the continuous development of the subject»[130].

But it is not so. By maintaining that philosophy does not advance knowledge since it is merely the activity of pointing out mistakes in language, analytic philosophy is sharply discontinuous with the philosophical tradition, in particular with Plato's activity.

That many analytic philosophers have maintained that philosophy does not advance knowledge is another main cause of the irrelevance of philosophy. For, if philosophy does not advance knowledge, if we do not seek to learn anything new by it, how can philosophy be useful, and what chance has it to continue to exist? Philosophy is like

[124] G. Ryle, *Collected papers*, cit., vol. II, p. 212.
[125] Ivi, p. 173.
[126] M. Dummett, *The nature and future of philosophy*, cit., p. 10.
[127] Ivi, p. 21.
[128] P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Comparisons and context*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, p. 9.
[129] Ivi, p. 19.
[130] L. Wittgenstein, *Lectures, Cambridge, 1932-1935*, Prometheus Books, New York 1979, pp. 27-28.

«a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it»[131].

10. *Analytic Philosophy and Scholasticism*

While maintaining that philosophy does not advance knowledge, inconsistently enough some leading analytic philosophers have admitted that philosophy should be acquisition of knowledge.

Thus, Moore says that «the first and most important problem of philosophy is: To give a general description of the whole Universe»[132].

Russell says that, «what concerns philosophy is the universe as a whole»[133]. But, while «philosophers from Thales onwards have tried to understand the world» and, «even when they have failed, they have supplied material to their successors and an incentive to new efforts», analytic philosophy is not «carrying on this tradition»[134]. It seems «to have abandoned, without necessity, that grave and important task which philosophy throughout the ages has hitherto pursued», and «to concern itself, not with the world and our relation to it, but only with the different ways in which silly people can say silly things»[135]. In particular, Wittgenstein «seems to have grown tired of serious thinking and to have invented a doctrine which would make such an activity unnecessary»[136]. His «positive doctrines seem to me trivial», and his «negative doctrines, unfounded»[137]. But, «if this is all that philosophy has to offer, I cannot think that it is a worthy subject of study»[138].

Dummett says that, if philosophy is taught today in universities, it is only because of a «historical precedent», namely that, «when the first Western universities came into being», philosophy «was not sharply differentiated from what we call "natural science"», and «the quest for truth was a single activity»[139]. Then it was easy to find a justification for philosophy. But, in the twentieth century, «the distinction between the natural

[131] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, cit., Part I, § 271.
[132] G. E. Moore, *Some main problems of philosophy*, Allen & Unwin, London 1953, p. 2.
[133] B. Russell, *An outline of philosophy*, Routledge, London 1995, p. 189.
[134] B. Russell, *My philosophical development*, Routledge, London 1995, p. 170.
[135] *Ibidem*.
[136] Ivi, p. 161.
[137] Ivi, pp. 160-161.
[138] Ivi, p. 170.
[139] M. Dummett, *The nature and future of philosophy*, cit., p. 2.

sciences and the humanities came to be universally recognized»[140]. So, it has become difficult to find a justification for philosophy. Indeed, «if universities had been an invention of the second half of the twentieth century, would anyone have thought to include philosophy among the subjects that they taught and studied? It seems very doubtful»[141]. Therefore, «it would be easy to conclude that» philosophy «is an anachronism»[142]. The «layman or non-professional expects philosophers to answer deep questions of great import for an understanding of the world», and «the layman is quite right: if philosophy does not aim at answering such questions, it is worth nothing»[143].

But, contrary to the layman's expectation, many analytic philosophers do not answer deep questions of great import for an understanding of the world. Even Ayer admits that many analytic philosophers «do not set out to describe, or even to explain, the world, still less to change it. Their concern is only with the way in which we speak about the world», so for them philosophy «is talk about talk»[144]. This has driven philosophy into «the scholasticism which has been threatening to overtake it»[145].

At the origin of the scholasticism of analytic philosophy there is the fact that, as Feyerabend points out, in analytic philosophy departments, students are «trained to repeat the tricks after» their instructors, «so that sometime in the future they may perhaps be able to become trainers themselves, modifying the tricks a little here and there (this is called "original research")»[146]. For, analytic philosophy «assumes that it is good to conform» to the standards which are determined by the «consensus of those in the discipline»[147]. Ultimately, this amounts to assuming that it is good to conform to «the professional nonsense that comes out of Oxford»[148]. This assumption contrasts

[140] Ivi, p. 3.
[141] Ivi, p. 2.
[142] *Ibidem*.
[143] M. Dummett, *The logical basis of metaphysics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1991, p. 1.
[144] A. J. Ayer, *The concept of a person and other essays*, St Martin's Press, New York 1963, p. 3.
[145] Ivi, p. 35.
[146] P. Feyerabend, *Letters to the Director of the Department of Philosophy*, in M. Motterlini (ed.), I. Lakatos-P. Feyerabend, *For and against method*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1999, pp. 382-393, p. 386.
[147] Ivi, p. 384.
[148] Ivi, p. 386.

with the fact that «philosophy has very often turned against the status quo», indeed, «this is one of the most eminent functions of philosophy»[149]. People in analytic philosophy might object: If you do not conform to the standards which are determined by the consensus of those in the discipline, «will the "standards of philosophy" suffer from this?»[150]. To this one may answer: «Well, Plato says that all things change for the worse; the worst thing alone will change for the better. The standards of philosophy, then, can only improve»[151].

II. *Some Remarks about Philosophy as Acquisition of Knowledge*

To avoid misunderstandings, it may be useful to make some remarks about the view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge.

(1) In the statement that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge, "knowledge" is supposed to include methods of acquisition of knowledge. Indeed, the acquisition of knowledge may require new methods, since nothing guarantees that the methods that permitted the acquisition of the present knowledge will also permit the acquisition of new kinds of knowledge. Therefore, it is important that "knowledge" is understood as including methods of acquisition of knowledge. Grice even says: «By and large the greatest philosophers have been the greatest, and the most self-conscious, methodologists; indeed, I am tempted to regard this fact as primarily accounting for their greatness as philosophers»[152].

(2) The view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge must not be confused with Russell's view of philosophy. Admittedly, Russell says that «philosophy arises from an unusually obstinate attempt to arrive at real knowledge»[153]. And «philosophy is distinguished from science only by being more critical»[154]. But this does not mean that, according to Russell, philosophy is acquisition of knowledge. Indeed, Russell declares that the acquisition of knowledge «is the business of

[149] Ivi, p. 383.
[150] Ivi, p. 387.
[151] *Ibidem*.
[152] P. Grice, *Reply to Richards*, in R. E. Grandy-R. Warner (eds.), *Philosophical grounds of rationality: Intentions, categories, ends*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1986, pp. 45-106, p. 66.
[153] B. Russell, *An outline of philosophy*, cit. p. 1.
[154] Ivi, p. 239.

science rather than of philosophy»[155]. When he says «that philosophy is critical», he means to say «only that it examines the various parts of our supposed knowledge to see whether they are mutually consistent and whether the inferences employed are such as seem valid to a careful scrutiny»[156].

(3) The view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge must not be confused with Quine's view of philosophy. Admittedly, Quine says that philosophy is «concerned with our knowledge of the world and the nature of the world»[157]. But he says so simply because he assumes that philosophy, properly conceived, is «a part of» the present «science»[158]. In particular, epistemology «is contained in natural science, as a chapter of psychology»[159]. For, according to Quine, only the present science is acquisition of knowledge.

(4) The claim of many analytic philosophers that philosophy does not advance knowledge conflicts with the fact that, really, philosophy has essentially contributed to the advancement of knowledge.

For example, philosophy has had an essential role in the birth of modern science. Thus, Galileo says that there is an intimate connection between the new science and «the true and good philosophy, especially in that part which concerns the constitution of the universe»[160]. Indeed, there is a substantial difference between the geometer-astronomers, who formulate their hypotheses only «to save the appearances in whatever way necessary», and «the philosopher-astronomers», who «try to investigate, as the greatest and most admirable problem, the true constitution of the universe»[161]. Copernicus, «putting on the philosopher's dress», engaged himself «in the investigation of this constitution, recognizing» that so «one would have gained in philosophy a knowledge as excellent as that which consists in knowing the true disposition of the parts of the world»[162]. Galileo himself «studied for a greater number of years in philosophy than months in pure mathematics»[163].

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[155] Ivi, p. 1.
[156] Ivi, p. 239.
[157] W. V. Quine, *Quine in dialogue*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2008, pp. 5-6.
[158] Ivi, p. 6.
[159] W. V. Quine, *Ontological relativity and other essays*, Columbia University Press, New York 1969, p. 83.
[160] G. Galilei, *Opere*, cit., vol. V p. 102.
[161] *Ibidem*.
[162] Ivi, pp. 297-298.
[163] Ivi, vol. X p. 353.

Philosophy has had an essential role, not only in the birth of modern science, but also in subsequent physics. Thus, Rovelli says: «Newton thought of himself as a philosopher, and started by discussing this with Descartes, and had strong philosophical ideas»[164]. Also, «Einstein would have never done relativity without having read all the philosophers and having a head full of philosophy» and «Heisenberg would have never done quantum mechanics without being full of philosophy»[165]. Indeed, Heisenberg argues that «in classical mechanics there's something philosophically wrong, there's not enough emphasis on empiricism», and it is this «that allows him to construct this fantastically new physical theory, scientific theory, which is quantum mechanics»[166]. The same applies to «Maxwell, Boltzmann»[167]. In fact, «all the major steps of science in the past were done by people who were very aware of methodological, fundamental, even metaphysical questions being posed»[168].

(5) The view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge contrasts with the sapiential view of philosophy – the view according to which philosophy is love of wisdom, understood as an alleged superior kind of understanding capable of grasping the essence of things, and inaccessible to scientific knowledge and to rational knowledge in general.

Thus, Heidegger says that «science does not think»[169]. Indeed, «science is the disavowal of all knowledge of truth»[170]. Only «philosophy is the knowledge of the essence of things», and hence is «sovereign knowledge»[171].

Gadamer says that philosophy is «concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method», that is, «experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science»[172].

But this conflicts with the fact that there is no special source of

[164] C. Rovelli, *Science is not about certainty: A philosophy of physics*, «Edge» 5.30.12, https://www.edge.org/conversation/a-philosophy-of-physics [18.06.2018].
[165] *Ibidem*.
[166] *Ibidem*.
[167] *Ibidem*.
[168] *Ibidem*.
[169] M. Heidegger, *What is called thinking?* Harper & Row, New York 1968, p. 8.
[170] M. Heidegger, *Basic questions of philosophy: Selected "problems" of "logic"*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1994, p. 5.
[171] Ivi, p. 29.
[172] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and method*, Continuum, New York 2004, p. xxi.

knowledge which is available to philosophy but not to science.

(6) The view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge does not exclude that other views of philosophy are possible. It only excludes that they can convincingly answer the charge that philosophy has become irrelevant.

Thus, it excludes that they can convincingly answer the charge, attributed to Feynman, that philosophy «is about as useful to scientists as ornithology is to birds»[173].

It excludes that they can convincingly answer Krauss' charge that «science progresses and philosophy doesn't», and «the worst part of philosophy is the philosophy of science; the only people» who «read work by philosophers of science are other philosophers of science. It has no impact on physics what so ever»[174].

It excludes that they can convincingly answer Rota's charge that analytic «philosophers are not concerned with facing up» to «any relevant features» of the world; therefore, «like ostriches with their heads buried in the sand, they will meet the fate of those who refuse to remember the past and fail to face the challenges of our difficult present: increasing irrelevance followed by eventual extinction»[175].

12. *The Objection that Only Science Can be Acquisition of Knowledge*

Against the view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge, several analytic philosophers have objected that, after the birth of modern science, only science can be acquisition of knowledge.

Thus, Russell says that, what the present «science cannot discover, mankind cannot know»[176]. Therefore, we «shall be wise to build our philosophy upon» the present «science»[177].

Quine says that the philosopher can only carry out «his reasoning within the inherited world theory»[178]. That is, within the present science.

[173] P. Kitcher, *A plea for science studies*, in N. Koertge (ed.), *A house built on sand: Exposing postmodernist myths about science*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, pp. 32-56, p. 32.
[174] R. Andersen, *Has physics made philosophy and religion obsolete? Interview to Lawrence Krauss*, «The Atlantic» April 23, 2012.
[175] G.-C. Rota, *Indiscrete thoughts*, Birkhäuser, Boston 1997, p. 103.
[176] B. Russell, *Religion and science*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1974, p. 243.
[177] B. Russell, *Logic and knowledge*, Spokesman, Nottingham 2007, p. 339.
[178] W. V. Quine, *Theories and things*, cit., p. 72.

For, «scientific method is the way to truth»[179].

This objection, however, is unjustified, because it depends on two unwarranted assumptions.

The first assumption is that science is acquisition of knowledge since it is based on a method which is available to science but not to philosophy, namely, the «new scientific method which was fashioned almost entirely by Galileo Galilei»[180]. This assumption is unwarranted because, contrary to a widespread misunderstanding, Galilei did not fashion a new scientific method. Both Galilei and Newton declared to use, and actually used, Aristotle's analytic-synthetic method as the method of modern science[181].

The second assumption is that knowledge is exhausted by the present sciences, so the present sciences are the only true channel of knowledge. This assumption is unwarranted because there are areas of experience which the present sciences cannot account for. The present sciences are what we already know, philosophy is about what we do not yet know, thus philosophy is concerned with questions which are beyond the present sciences – not in the sense that they are open questions of some of the present sciences, but in the sense that they are open questions of none of the present sciences. Dealing with such questions requires new ideas, and philosophy may try to devise them[182]. There is much space for philosophy, because philosophy is about what we do not yet know, and the things that we do not yet know are plentiful. Already Seneca admonished: «A time will come when our posterity will marvel that we were ignorant of such obvious things» (Seneca, *Nat. Quaest.* VII 25).

Of course, being about what we do not yet know, philosophy moves on a muddy ground, and is always exposed to the risk of failure. But, when successful, philosophy may even open new paths and give birth to new sciences. In fact, this is what philosophy has done from the seventeenth century until recently. For example, both computer science and cognitive science originated from Turing's philosophical analysis of the computational behaviour of human beings, and Bayesian statistics

[179] W. V. Quine, *Word and object*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2013, p. 21.
[180] M. Kline, *Mathematics for the nonmathematician*, Dover, Mineola 1985, p. 284
[181] For details, see C. Cellucci, *Rethinking logic: Logic in relation to mathematics, evolution, and method*, Springer, Cham 2013, Chap. 8.
[182] For some examples of such questions, see C. Cellucci, *Rethinking knowledge*, cit., Section 2.12.

originated from the philosophical efforts to clarify what a rational belief is. There is no reason to suppose that new sciences will not be born in the future, and that none of them will originate from philosophy.

13. *Philosophy as Essentially Different from Science*

Some analytic philosophers have motivated the objection that only science can be acquisition of knowledge by saying that philosophy is completely different from the sciences.

Thus, Dummett says that «philosophy stands in complete contrast with sciences»[183]. For, «its methods wholly diverge from those of science, and its objective differs to an equal extent», moreover «the results of philosophy differ fundamentally in character from those of the sciences»[184]. Philosophy has problems and techniques of its own, not aimed at knowledge acquisition, indeed, in philosophy «we face a cluster of problems that must be tackled by the techniques of the philosopher, not of the physicist»[185]. If «philosophy has budded off» a number of sciences «that have declared their independence from it», it is not because philosophy is continuous with the sciences, but because it contained extraneous elements, indeed, philosophy is «what is left when the disciplines to which it gave birth have left the parental home»[186]. That is, philosophy is what is left when it is liberated from extraneous elements; genuine philosophical problems are those which are left after this liberation. Owing to the presence of extraneous elements, «philosophy, although as ancient as any other subject and a great deal more ancient than most», has «remained for so long "in its early stages"», that is, in stages in which its practitioners had «not yet attained a clear view of its subject-matter and its goals»[187]. But, with the birth of analytic philosophy, philosophy has at last «struggled out of its early stage into maturity»[188]. Specifically, «the turning-point» in philosophy «was the work of Frege»[189]. For, «only with Frege was the proper object of philosophy finally established», namely,

[183] M. Dummett, *The nature and future of philosophy*, cit., p. 7.
[184] *Ibidem*.
[185] Ivi, p. 30.
[186] Ivi, pp. 3-4.
[187] M. Dummett, *Truth and other enigmas*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1978, p. 457.
[188] *Ibidem*.
[189] *Ibidem*.

«that the goal of philosophy is the analysis of the structure of thought» as distinguished «from the study of the psychological process of thinking»; and «that the only proper method for analysing thought consists in the analysis of language»[190]. These are the defining characteristics of analytic philosophy.

But it is unjustified to say that philosophy stands in complete contrast with sciences, because its methods, objectives and results wholly diverge from those of the sciences. For, from its beginning in the Presocratic period onward, philosophy has pursued aims that are not essentially different from those of the sciences. Some of the present scientific results are answers to what were once genuine philosophical problems about something that, at the time, human beings did not yet know.

Also, it is unjustified to say that philosophy has problems and techniques of its own, not aimed at knowledge acquisition. If so, then, as Adorno says, «the argument deteriorates into the technique of conceptless specialists amid the concept, as it is now spreading academically in the so-called "analytic philosophy", which robots can learn and copy»[191].

Also, it is unjustified to say that, if philosophy has budded off a number of sciences that have declared their independence from it, it is because philosophy contained extraneous elements and, by budding off a number of sciences, has liberated itself from such extraneous elements; genuine philosophical problems are those which are left after this liberation. This contrasts with the fact that, as stated above, some of the present scientific results are answers to what were once genuine philosophical problems.

Also, it is unjustified to say that, owing to the presence of extraneous elements, philosophy has remained for an extremely long time in its early stages, but, with the birth of analytic philosophy, it has at last struggled out of its early stage into maturity. This is based on the assumption that, while in philosophy, for two and a half millennia, everything has been questioned, every stance has been just a matter of individual convictions, conversely, analytic philosophy has marked a turning point. It has started an entirely new approach to philosophy, in which each philosopher, adding stone to stone, contributes to erect a shared building in cooperation with other philosophers. But this assumption is contradicted by the fact that, as pointed out above,

[190] Ivi, p. 458.
[191] T. W. Adorno, *Negative dialectics*, Routledge, London 2004, pp. 29-30.

analytic philosophers have opposite views even on key issues.

Also, it is unjustified to say that, specifically, the turning-point in philosophy was the work of Frege, with which was the proper object of philosophy finally established, namely, that the goal of philosophy is the analysis of the structure of thought, and that the proper method for analysing thought consists in the analysis of language. For, to say that the goal of philosophy is the analysis of the structure of thought, is based on the assumption that there is an isomorphism between thought and reality, so the analysis of the structure of reality reduces to the analysis of the structure of thought. But this assumption is unfounded, because there are very many thoughts that have no correspondence to reality, therefore, an analysis of the structure of thought need not say anything about the structure of reality. Moreover, to say that the only proper method for analysing thought consists in the analysis of language, is based on the assumption that there is an isomorphism between language and thought. But this assumption is also unfounded, because it identifies thought with verbal thought, disregarding other kinds of thought, such as visual thought, which plays an essential role in scientific work. Thus, Einstein says: «The words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought» are, «in my case, of visual and some of muscular type»[192]. Hadamard says: «Words are totally absent from my mind when I really think», and «do not reappear in my consciousness before I have accomplished or given up the research»[193].

14. *Philosophy as Acquisition of Knowledge and Mathematics*

Some analytic philosophers have motivated the objection that only science can be acquisition of knowledge also by saying that, like mathematics, philosophy is an armchair subject, requiring no inputs from experience but only thought.

Thus, Dummett says that, unlike science, philosophy «is a discipline that makes no observations, conducts no experiments, and needs no

[192] A. Einstein, *A testimonial*, in J. Hadamard, *The psychology of invention in the mathematical field*, Dover, Mineola 1954, pp. 142-143.
[193] J. Hadamard, *The psychology of invention in the mathematical field*, Dover, Mineola 1954, p. 75.

input from experience: an armchair subject, requiring only thought»[194]. In this respect, philosophy is like «another armchair discipline: mathematics. Mathematics likewise needs no input from experience: it is the product of thought alone»[195]. Thus, «philosophy shares with mathematics the peculiarity that it does not appeal to any new sources of information, but relies solely upon reasoning on the basis of what we already know»[196]. The «example of mathematics benefits philosophy, despite their very different methodologies»[197]. For, it shows that thought, without any specialized input from experience, can «take us very far»[198]. Indeed, «look at how many wonderful things mathematics does: and yet it is "only" the logical derivation of consequences from evident principles»[199].

But it is unjustified to say that only science can be acquisition of knowledge because, like mathematics, philosophy is an armchair subject, requiring no inputs from experience but only thought.

To begin with, it is problematic to assert that mathematics is an armchair subject, requiring no inputs from experience but only thought. As Rota points out, this amounts to asserting that mathematicians «spew out solutions of one problem after another by dint of pure brain power, simply by staring long enough at a blank piece of paper»[200]. Now, while this «may appropriately describe the way to solve the linguistic puzzles of today's impoverished philosophy», that is, analytic philosophy, it «is wide of the mark in describing the work of mathematicians, or any kind of serious work»[201]. For, mathematics essentially involves interactions with the world beyond the armchair. As Atyah says, «almost all mathematics originally arose from external reality»[202]. And most of subsequent mathematics has arisen from external reality. In fact, most mathematical problems arise from the external reality, and hence from experience, and are solved using hypotheses that are justified on the basis of their compatibility with

[194] M. Dummett, *The nature and future of philosophy*, cit., p. 4.
[195] *Ibidem*.
[196] Ivi, p. 10.
[197] Ivi, p. 5.
[198] M. Dummett, *Prof. Vattimo, non dimentichi la ragione*, «Il Sole 24 Ore», August 3, 1997.
[199] *Ibidem*.
[200] G.-C. Rota, *Indiscrete thoughts*, cit., pp. 100-101.
[201] Ivi, p. 101.
[202] M. Atiyah, *Joint interview with Isadore Singer, by Martin Raussen and Christian Skau*, «Notices of the American Mathematical Society» 52 (2005), pp. 223-231, p. 226.

the existing knowledge, and hence with experience[203].

Similarly, it is problematic to assert that philosophy is an armchair subject, requiring no inputs from experience but only thought. This is in conflict with the fact that almost all philosophy originally arose, in the Presocratic period, from external reality, and most of subsequent philosophy has arisen from external reality. In fact, most philosophical problems arise from the external reality, and hence from experience, and are solved using hypotheses that are justified on the basis of their compatibility with the existing knowledge, and hence with experience. If philosophy is to answer questions of great import for an understanding of the world, it necessarily needs inputs from experience, and hence cannot require only thought. By thought alone, we can at most reformulate what we already know in other terms, not answer questions of great import for an understanding of the world.

15. *The Objection that Ethics and Politics are about Values, not Facts*

Against the view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge, several analytic philosophers have also objected that it excludes ethics and politics, because the latter are about values, while all knowledge is of facts.

Thus, Carnap says that «the philosophy of moral values or moral norms» is «not an investigation of facts», its purpose is «to state norms for human action or judgments about moral values»[204]. Now, a norm for human action, or a judgment about moral values, «is neither true nor false. It does not assert anything and can neither be proved nor disproved»[205]. So, norms or value statements «are not scientific propositions (taking the word scientific to mean any assertive proposition)»[206]. They have «no theoretical sense. Therefore we assign them to the realm of metaphysics»[207].

This objection, however, is based on the assumption that values and facts are completely independent of each other. But this assumption is unjustified. For, on the one hand, values depend on what we know about the world or man, and may change as our knowledge

[203] For more on this, see C. Cellucci, *Rethinking knowledge*, cit., Part IV.
[204] R. Carnap, *Philosophy and logical syntax*, Kegan Paul, London 1935, p. 23.
[205] Ivi, p. 24.
[206] Ivi, p. 25.
[207] Ivi, p. 26.

changes, so values depend on facts. On the other hand, values guide us in selecting the scientific problems to work on, the hypotheses to solve them, and the criteria for evaluating the hypotheses, so the selection of facts depends on values.

Then, it is unjustified to say that the view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge excludes ethics and politics since the latter are about values, while all knowledge is of facts. As Dewey says, «inquiry, discovery take the same place in morals that they have come to occupy in sciences and nature»[208]. Indeed, «when the consciousness of science is fully impregnated with the consciousness of human value», the «split between» the «scientific and the moral and ideal will be destroyed»[209]. If the claim is made that, in ethics and politics, «"values" are involved and that inquiry as "scientific" has nothing to do with values, the inevitable consequence is that inquiry in the human area is confined to what is superficial and comparatively trivial»[210].

Like science, also ethics and politics are acquisition of knowledge, although not of theoretical knowledge but of practical knowledge, that is, knowledge as a means to action. Then, an answer to the objection that the view that philosophy is acquisition of knowledge excludes ethics and politics is already given by Plato. For he says that «it is not by ignorance but by knowledge that men will make good decisions»[211]. Indeed, to make good decisions requires that men have «knowledge of all good things, and of their production in the present, the future, and the past, and of all bad things likewise»[212].

Since ethics and politics are concerned with how men can make good decisions, it follows that both ethics and politics must be acquisition of knowledge. Thus philosophy is acquisition of both theoretical and practical knowledge.

16. *Propositional and Non-Propositional Knowledge*

That philosophy is acquisition of both theoretical and practical knowledge implies that philosophy is acquisition not only of propositional

[208] J. Dewey, *Reconstruction in philosophy*, Dover, Mineola 2004, p. 100.
[209] *Ibidem*.
[210] Ivi, p. xvi.
[211] Plat., *Resp.*, IV 428b 7-8.
[212] Plat., *Lach.*, 199d 5-7.

knowledge but also of non-propositional knowledge. For, much practical knowledge is non-propositional.

Once again, this is made quite clear by Plato. For he says that, «when you talk about cobbling», you mean «the knowledge of making shoes»[213]. When you talk «about carpentering», you mean «the knowledge of making wooden furniture»[214]. When you talk about about «farming», you mean «the knowledge of how to raise a harvest from the earth»[215]. Now, the knowledge of making shoes, the knowledge of making wooden furniture, and the knowledge of how to raise a harvest from the earth, are all instances of practical and non-propositional knowledge.

Admittedly, Plato assumes that, in addition to practical knowledge like the one just mentioned, non-propositional knowledge also includes intuitive knowledge. He describes the latter as something which «cannot in any way be expressed in words like other knowledge» but «is suddenly born in the soul, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself»[216]. But one need not follow Plato in assuming that non-propositional knowledge includes intuitive knowledge. This assumption is unnecessary, because the acquisition of knowledge can be accounted for without appealing to any form of alleged intuitive knowledge[217].

That philosophy is acquisition not only of propositional knowledge but also of non-propositional knowledge, contrasts with analytic philosophy. For, many analytic philosophers claim that knowledge can only be propositional.

For example, Williams says that he cannot understand «how something can be non-propositional and yet knowledge»[218]. For, «knowledge requires judgements – thoughts or beliefs that can be true or false. Such thoughts demand propositional content: the sort of content that is expressed by complete sentences»[219]. Therefore, knowledge can only be propositional.

But the claim that knowledge can only be propositional conflicts with the fact that a large part of human knowledge is perceptual

[213] Plat., *Theaet.*, 146d 6-8.
[214] Ivi, 146e 1-2.
[215] Plat., *Resp.*, IV 428c 8.
[216] Plat. (?), *Ep.* VII, 341c 4-d 2.
[217] For details, see C. Cellucci, *Rethinking knowledge*, cit., Sections 2.14, 12.11.
[218] M. Williams, *Problems of knowledge: A critical introduction to epistemology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, p. 98.
[219] Ivi, p. 140.

knowledge, which is non-propositional and unconscious, being the result of processes that occur too fast and at too low a level in the mind to be accessible to direct inspection[220]. The claim that knowledge can only be propositional also conflicts with the fact that, as witnessed by the above cited statements by Einstein and Hadamard, thought processes involved in scientific work are largely non-linguistic.

17. *Analytic Philosophy and Progress*

As already pointed out above, some analytic philosophers believe that, while in philosophy, for two and a half millennia, everything has been questioned, every stance has been just a matter of individual convictions, conversely, analytic philosophy has marked a turning point. It has started an entirely new approach to philosophy in which each philosopher, adding stone to stone, contributes to erect a shared building in cooperation with other philosophers. This belief implies that, with analytic philosophy, philosophical problems may have an assured answer, so philosophy does make progress. For example, some analytic philosophers believe that, thanks to analytic philosophy, far more about truth is known now than was known half a century ago, as a result of technical work by philosophical and mathematical logicians, and that it has been established that truth does not coincide with provability.

Thus, Williamson says that, «after two and a half millennia of futile attempts to answer» philosophical questions, a turning point has taken place in philosophy with the rise of «the broad, heterogeneous intellectual tradition we conveniently label "analytic philosophy"»[221]. While philosophy remained for two and a half millennia in its early stages, with analytic philosophy it has arrived at «the end of the beginning»[222]. In fact, «in many areas of philosophy, we know much more in 2007 that was known in 1957»[223]. For example, «far more is known in 2007 about truth than was known in 1957, as a result of technical work by philosophical and mathematical logicians»[224]. Thus, «some parts of contemporary analytic philosophy just pass the

[220] For details, see C. Cellucci, *Rethinking knowledge*, cit., Chap. 15.
[221] T. Williamson, *The philosophy of philosophy*, Blackwell, Malden 2007, p. 279.
[222] Ivi, p. 292.
[223] Ivi, pp. 279-280.
[224] Ivi, p. 280.

methodological threshold for some cumulative progress to occur»[225].

Marconi says that, with analytic philosophy, philosophical problems «may have an answer», and «at least some of them have had an answer», so, «in this sense philosophy has made progresses»[226]. For example, analytic «philosophy has established» that «truth does not coincide with provability»[227].

But, it is illusory to believe that, with analytic philosophy, philosophical questions may receive an assured answer, therefore philosophy does make progress. As already pointed out above, analytic philosophers have opposite views even on key issues.

In particular, it unjustified to say that, thanks to analytic philosophy, far more about truth is known now than was known half a century ago, as a result of technical work by philosophical and mathematical logicians. For, the question is whether such technical work is relevant to our understanding of the world. This is doubtful, because it can be argued that the concept of truth is too rough to be useful for all serious uses in science, and must be replaced with more refined concepts[228].

It is likewise unjustified to say that, thanks to analytic philosophy, it has been established that truth does not coincide with provability. For, this result – namely, Gödel's first incompleteness theorem – cannot be ascribed to analytic philosophy but only to mathematical logic, which is a conventional, albeit somewhat marginal, branch of mathematics.

Gödel himself forcefully stresses that mathematical logic and his first incompleteness theorem owe nothing to analytic philosophy. Indeed, he says that «Wittgenstein's negative attitude toward symbolic language is a step backward. Those who, like Carnap, misuse symbolic language want to discredit mathematical logic; they want to prevent the appearance of philosophy»[229]. Generally, «the whole movement of the positivists wants to destroy philosophy; for this purpose they need to destroy mathematical logic as a tool»[230]. As to Gödel's first incompleteness theorem, «Wittgenstein did not understand it», indeed, «he interpreted it as a kind of logical paradox, while in fact it is just the opposite, namely a mathematical theorem within

[225] Ivi, p. 288.
[226] D. Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*, cit., p. 90.
[227] *Ibidem*.
[228] For details, see C. Cellucci, *Rethinking knowledge*, cit., Chaps. 8-9.
[229] H. Wang, *A logical journey: From Gödel to philosophy*, The MIT Press, Harvard 1997, p. 174, 5.4.10.
[230] *Ibidem*.

an absolutely uncontroversial part of mathematics (finitary number theory or combinatorics)»[231].

18. *Normal Philosophy and Revolutionary Philosophy?*

After dealing with the question of the relation of philosophy to knowledge, I return to the question of the specialist view of philosophical work.

I have already argued that the supposition that all philosophical work is cumulative, on which such view is based, is unjustified. On the other hand, Kuhn famously argued that the supposition that all scientific work is cumulative is unjustified and, on this basis, introduced a distinction between "normal science" and "revolutionary science". Therefore, one might be tempted to introduce a similar distinction between "normal philosophy" and "revolutionary philosophy".

Kuhn says that «"normal science" means research firmly based upon» a paradigm, namely, a set of fundamental assumptions that «some scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice»[232]. During that time, all members of that «scientific community work from a single paradigm»[233]. Therefore, «normal research» is «cumulative»[234]. On the other hand, "revolutionary science" means research in which a variety of alternatives to the old paradigm are put forward, but eventually a single new paradigm becomes established, thus all members of the scientific community in question «will again be practicing under a single, but now a different, paradigm»[235].

Similarly, one might be tempted to say that "normal philosophy" means research firmly based upon a paradigm, namely, a set of fundamental assumptions that some philosophical community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice. During that time, all members of that philosophical community work from a single paradigm. Therefore, normal philosophy is cumulative. On the other hand, "revolutionary philosophy" means research in which a variety of alternatives to the old paradigm are put forward,

[231] Ivi, p. 179, 5.5.5b.
[232] T. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1996, p. 10.
[233] Ivi, p. 162.
[234] Ivi, p. 96.
[235] Ivi, p. 152.

but eventually a single new paradigm becomes established, thus all members of the philosophical community in question will again be practicing under a single, but now a different, paradigm.

But the distinction between "normal philosophy" and "revolutionary philosophy" is unjustified, because the history of philosophy shows that at no time all members of a philosophical community work from a single paradigm, or eventually a single new paradigm becomes established. Radical changes in the fundamental assumptions do occur in the philosophical work. A famous first example of this is the change that Raphael represented, in *The School of Athens*, by depicting Plato with his forearm upraised and his index finger pointing to the heavens, and Aristotle with his arm extended and his palms down to the earth.

Actually, it could be argued that even Kuhn's distinction between "normal science" and "revolutionary science" is unjustified, because the history of science shows that at no time all members of a scientific community work from a single paradigm, or eventually a single new paradigm becomes established. For example, Chang considers several episodes in the history of science in which «there was no system that deserved a monopolistic dominance», and «not having one dominant system in each situation did not hamper, or would not have hampered, the progress of science»[236]. Chang convincingly argues that «we are not likely to arrive at the one perfect theory or viewpoint that will satisfy all our needs», and «it is better to foster a multitude of worthwhile systems, rather than only one»[237]. Theory-choice can «simply be a matter of each scientist deciding to take a particular avenue of investigation, without implying that all the other avenues are inferior, and that the inferior avenues should be closed off»[238]. Therefore, even the distinction between "normal science" and "revolutionary science" is unjustified.

19. *Ordinary Philosophy and Extraordinary Philosophy*

Instead of the distinction between "normal philosophy" and "revolutionary philosophy", it seems more appropriate to introduce a distinction

[236] H. Chang, *Is water H_2O? Evidence, realism and pluralism*, Springer, Dordrecht 2012, p. xix.
[237] Ivi, p. xx.
[238] Ivi, p. 288.

between "ordinary philosophy" and "extraordinary philosophy".

As I have already said, radical changes in the fundamental assumptions do occur in philosophical work. To this it may be added that such radical changes are mainly the result of the influence of great philosophers, who introduce new fundamental assumptions that give rise to new philosophical traditions.

A new philosophical tradition, however, does not necessarily supplant the previous ones, it may very well coexist, although even in fierce competition, with them. And, if different great philosophers in the same period give rise to different new philosophical traditions, none of them need become established. Even when, over time, some philosophical traditions die down, the work of the great philosophers who gave rise to them never becomes obsolete, it remains a vital source of inspiration for all successive generations. In fact, although virtually all views of great philosophers are sharply criticized, their work continues to be an essential reference point, even if only polemical, in all subsequent philosophical work.

Actually, philosophical traditions develop not only because of the work of great philosophers, but also because of the work of not so great philosophers. Marconi says that a great philosopher «can do without studying his antecedents, not because he is aware of all of them as logical possibilities in his titanic mind, but because, to some extent, he has no antecedents»[239]. But this is unconvincing. The work of great philosophers does not come out of the blue, it is prepared by that of other not so great philosophers, who either further develop or modify the work of previous great philosophers, or work at newly emerging questions that previous great philosophers could not consider and are essential to our understanding of the world. Thus, even the work of not so great philosophers may cause changes in philosophical traditions, although not as great as those caused by great philosophers.

In fact, also with respect to scientific work, Kuhn admits that, in addition to «major paradigm changes», there are «far smaller ones»[240]. A revolution is a «change involving a certain sort of reconstruction of group commitments. But it need not be a large change, nor need it seem revolutionary to those outside a single» scientific «community»[241]. This

[239] D. Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*, cit., p. 133.
[240] T. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, cit., p. 92.
[241] Ivi, p. 181.

type of change occurs «regularly on this smaller scale»[242]. Of course, it does not produce «a displacement of the conceptual network through which scientists view the world»[243]. Thus, it is «not so obviously revolutionary»[244]. Yet, it is revolutionary «for the members of a particular professional subspecialty»[245].

We may call the philosophical work of great philosophers "extraordinary philosophy", that of not so great philosophers "ordinary philosophy". Unlike analytic philosophy, both extraordinary and ordinary philosophy are not concerned with what Dennett calls artifactual puzzles, but with questions essential to our understanding of the world. Thus, the difference between extraordinary and ordinary philosophy does not lie in the kind of questions with which they are concerned – which is the same in both cases, questions essential to our understanding of the world – but only in the degree of originality of the answers given to those questions, which is higher in the case of extraordinary philosophy. Ordinary philosophy can even be, although need not be, cumulative, but philosophy as a whole is not cumulative. Indeed, if ordinary philosophy remains cumulative for a long period of time, eventually extraordinary philosophy prevents philosophy from getting bogged down in a state of quasi-stagnation.

The distinction between ordinary philosophy and extraordinary philosophy allows to give an alternative solution to the problem of the multiplication of philosophers. While Marconi maintains that the solution best suited to a situation in which professional philosophers are some tens of thousands is analytic philosophy, as argued above this solution leads to the irrelevance of philosophy. A better solution is to say that what most philosophers should do in this situation is ordinary philosophy. Thus their work, rather than being irrelevant, will be useful to our understanding of the world, and will prepare the way for possible future great philosophers.

20. *Conclusion*

Bobbio says that the question "Where is philosophy going?" can be

[242] *Ibidem*.
[243] Ivi, p. 102.
[244] Ivi, p. 6.
[245] Ivi, p. 50.

understood «in two ways», either «as a request to know where» one «thinks philosophy will actually go in the next few years», or «as an invitation to say where, according to» one's «preference, philosophy should go»[246]. Thus, «the same person could give two diametrically opposed answers» to the question, «and in fact two mutually independent ones. I observe that philosophy is going in one direction, but I would want it to go in the opposite direction»[247].

Just so! I observe that philosophy is going in one direction, that is, irrelevance, but I would want it to go in the opposite direction.

However, the direction in which Bobbio would want philosophy to go seems unable to rescue philosophy from irrelevance. For, Bobbio says that, while «science gives partial answers», and yet answers, «philosophy only asks questions without giving answers»[248]. Therefore, «one must not expect of philosophy what one expects of science, that is, answers, albeit partial ones»[249]. Indeed, «beyond the territories conquered by the scientific enterprise, there are only questions without answer»[250]. This is «a territory into which one ventures, knowing that there is no way out»[251]. For, «at this point there ends the sphere of knowledge and there begins that of non-knowledge, or that of knowledge by images, ciphers and symbols»[252].

The view that philosophy only asks questions without giving answers may be called, as Marconi suggests, «the jogger's view» of philosophy because, for the jogger «the important thing is to run, not to arrive somewhere»[253]. Similarly, according to the jogger's view of philosophy, for the philosopher the important thing is to ask questions, not to give answers. Sometimes, the jogger's view of philosophy is ascribed to Socrates. Thus, Black says that «a major innovation» in «Socrates was asking questions without giving answers»[254]. But this is misleading. For, the questions Socrates asks are always "leading" questions, that is, questions phrased in a manner that tends to suggest the

[246] N. Bobbio, *La filosofia e il bisogno di senso*, cit., p. 64.
[247] *Ibidem*.
[248] Ivi, p. 46.
[249] Ivi, p. 31.
[250] Ivi, p. 67.
[251] *Ibidem*.
[252] *Ibidem*.
[253] D. Marconi, *Il mestiere di pensare*, cit., p. 92.
[254] A. Black, *The "axial period": What was it and what does it signify?* «The Review of Politics» 70 (2008), pp. 23-39, p. 30.

desired answer to the discussant.

Anyway, the jogger's view of philosophy is inadequate. For, if philosophy only asks questions without giving answers, how can philosophy be useful, and what chance has it to continue to exist? For the layman, to receive no answer to a question from the philosopher is as frustrating as, for the child, to receive no answer to a question from the father.

In fact, it is unjustified to say that, beyond the territories conquered by the scientific enterprise, there are only questions without answer. Beyond those territories there is the vast land of that which we do not yet know. There is no known reason why such land should be unknowable. Dealing with questions about that land requires new ideas, and philosophy may try to devise them. By so doing, when successful, it may even open new paths and give birth to new sciences.

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